

ARTICLE APPROVED
ON PAGE 2-0WASHINGTON TIMES
4 March 1986

New Republicans act on a foreign policy consensus

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Well, as some of my young friends today would put it, "Wow! We finally did something right." Ferdinand Marcos is out, and — in a scenario filled with stunning ironies — an Aquino is actually president of the Philippines.

Perhaps most important for the United States and the rest of the world, the preponderant irony is that it is an American conservative administration that has finally shown how to break the logjam in the revolutionary foreign-policy situations that have bedeviled us since World War II!

Let us set aside, for this moment, the inspiring events inside the Philippines and focus only on the historic events that have occurred through the efforts of the American administration these last few months. How did all this happen?

The amazing thing is that the American policy toward the Philippines developed through a rare and new type of struggling internal consensus. It really was the outcome of the interplay, sometimes necessarily abrasive, of all the services — from the State Department to Congress to

the White House to all the defense services.

This outcome was not, at any one moment, pedantic or foreordained. Both the president and the others reacted at each step to new events — but then, unlike the Carter administration, they also acted.

The action, however, was always measured. At no point did the United States actually tell Mr. Marcos to leave. Instead, he was gradually but persistently surrounded by a web of American power, which finally impressed upon a man who looked as haggard and decadent as the old Empress Dowager of China, "It's over, kid, it's over."

Even President Reagan, despite his personal liking for Mr. Marcos, was won over by the consensus around him. In many respects, it can be looked upon as a modern, appropriate type of "intervention" by a country that realistically could not avoid intervening even if it wanted

to; its power is simply too great.

Who actually suggested the elections when Sen. Paul Laxalt, Republican from Nevada, visited then-President Marcos last fall? It is still unclear, but we do know that the American ambassador and other high officials had been urging elections on Mr. Marcos for some time. And it was those elections, which all sides figured they could use for themselves, that then could be used to break the logjam in the Philippines itself. It appeared to give openings to everybody.

Former National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski told me a couple of years ago that in terms of foreign policy "we have no ethic for political change in the United States." Former Undersecretary of State George Ball told me about the same time, regretting the absence of the formerly dominant Eastern establishment and its relative coherence: "What we are seeing is a shift

of American political and economic power westward — and that is the key to why the American foreign policy situation is so bad today."

Both men were right — then. But I think we are beginning to see the new American politicians from beyond the Rockies and the Eastern establishment developing — out of

trial and error and a little common sense — a new American ethic of encouraging foreign political change.

Actually, had anyone been looking, he would have seen inconsistent but continuing signals of political sophistication for some time:

- In Grenada, for instance, the real signal was not the military maneuver, but that the American military men in charge were sophisticated enough politically that they were able to weed out the Marxists or pseudo-Marxists (all of whom went free) within two days and hold for trial only those actually involved in the massacre atop Fort Rupert.

- In El Salvador — again as the result of a consensus policy — U.S. power delicately applied has offered

the military the choice of being the despised (and doomed) killers of the old right or becoming a respectable military at the service of the democratic government.

When you compare these largely unanalyzed and unheralded events with the Carter administration's endless and finally futile negotiations with a far-cleverer Nicaraguan dictator, Anastasio Somoza, you see the change in tone from old liberal to new conservative. President Jimmy Carter finally was bamboozled by Mr. Somoza because Mr.

Somoza promised "elections." The tragic outcome, sculpted by an innocent and power-chary American president, is Nicaragua today, a nation in which many die and will die because American power was not used at the right time.

The difference, as I see it: too many American liberals have abandoned their own liberal tradition for a handwringing that repeats endlessly, "American power is evil and American power is powerless" (Remember, Dominican dictator Leonidas Trujillo was assassinated, with CIA involvement, under John F. Kennedy, and nobody said anything except, "Hooray!")

My own basic feeling is that the New Republicans have (1) built on the original liberal tradition; and (2) been able to do things effectively because so many of them are self-made men who have run businesses or cities, who therefore accept risk as a part of life and are willing to act.

So congratulations to everybody — to President Corazon Aquino, to her late martyred husband, to the Philippine people and army, and also to a whole group of Americans. I have a feeling that the Vietnam syndrome — which started with Who Lost China, and Cuba, and Iran, and Nicaragua — is just beginning to fade from sight.

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